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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [GR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: AEGEAN ILLEGAL MIGRATION: GREEK COMPLAINTS AND
APPEAL FOR HELP

Classified By: DCM THOMAS COUNTRYMAN. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In a May 22 meeting with DCM and DATT, Deputy Minister of Mercantile Marine, Aegean, and Island Policy Mr. Panagiotis Kamenos discussed the problem of illegal migration in the Aegean. According to Kamenos, over 11,000 illegal immigrants had entered Greece this year, and his ministry, which included the Coast Guard, needed help. He requested U.S. assistance in several Coast Guard activities and training. He stressed the need for Greek-Turkish cooperation to attack the illegal immigration problem. END SUMMARY.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

¶2. (C) Kamenos said he saw two solutions to illegal immigration. The first was bilateral operations and training aimed at interdicting illegal immigrants in the Aegean. Kamenos repeatedly mentioned that Greece's illegal immigration problem was also an EU problem and that he intended to use future EU funds to help solve the issue. Second, he wanted NGOs responsible for the protection of immigrants to be more flexible and helpful in allowing Greek authorities to screen, detect, and prosecute illegal immigrants and the ship owners who illegally transport them to Greece.

¶3. (C) Kamenos claimed that Greece was making progress, citing recent Parliamentary legislation that would allow the Coast Guard to exceed the current induction limit of 1000 persons this year and to add two Coast Guard ships in Lesbos. Kamenos said cooperation between the Navy and Coast Guard was improving though stove pipes still existed in the Greek military and it was difficult to get the Navy to share information and capabilities with the Coast Guard. Kamenos claimed he was working that issue hard. He also stressed that illegal immigration was a difficult problem to counter since the ship owners and crews reaped high rewards with very little risk. The average immigrant paid more than 20,000 USD for transport into the Aegean. On the other hand, although the maximum sentence for a ship owner found guilty of alien smuggling was ten years, most received sentences of five years or less. Kamenos claimed many of the boat pilots were from Turkish jails with little or nothing to lose. Additionally, the ship owners were becoming more sophisticated and elusive using difficult-to-detect plastic boats.

14. (C) DCM acknowledged Kamenos' problems and underscored that the U.S. could provide assistance in many areas. But DCM identified other factors that needed to be addressed if the immigration problem were to be fully resolved in Greece. He explained that Greece had to increase its control over its maritime domain through the acquisition of more sophisticated technology and trained personnel. The best situation was one where Greece possessed the means to interdict illegal immigrant boats before they entered Greek waters in the Aegean. He said the U.S. could help in this area by advising the Greeks on the procurement of an effective maritime surveillance and detection system.

TURKISH COOPERATION

15. (C) Kamenos confided that U.S. involvement was the only way to get Turkish cooperation because it was very difficult for Greece to get Turkey to take the necessary steps against corrupt crews and illegal migrants. He said the GOT was not corrupt but ship owners and crews were. U.S. intervention could help get the Turkish government to begin prosecuting the ship owners, stiffening sentences, and preventing the departure of migrants headed for Greece.

16. (C) DCM told Kamenos Greece must continue to work with Turkey to urge them to enforce existing EU and international laws and to increase the penalties against not only the Turkish boat owners and crews who were apprehended, but also the organizers. Acknowledging that effective measures would

be tough and controversial, DCM said Greece could re-examine the openness of certain Greek island ports to Turkish boat traffic as a means to compel the GOT to make a greater effort to enforce existing laws against illegal migration. At the same time, he noted that Greek behavior mirrored Turkish behavior: both countries want to stop migrants on their eastern borders, but do encourage those who enter to keep moving westward. Greece needed to "raise the costs" for people smugglers operating with impunity in Athens and elsewhere. Stiffer sentences and more certain prosecution against both smugglers into Greece and those who smuggled people through and out of Greece had to be part of the solution. Kamenos replied he was working on this issue and had proposed that a detention facility be constructed on an uninhabited island in the Aegean specifically for the long term detention of the apprehended crews. Likewise, a similar structure would be constructed on another island for immigrant detention.

U.S. TRAINING

17. (C) Kamenos asked for U.S. assistance in several Coast Guard activities, including anti-terrorist training, customs security training, helicopter pilot training, Coast Guard officer exchange programs, improved search and surveillance systems, training and help in the acquisition of illegal-entry-prevention technology and biometrics. Additionally, Kamenos said he saw two basic requirements: 1) training and cooperation between officers, and 2) conducting a joint Greece-U.S. night operation.

18. (S/NF) DATT said that training and help were available but the requirements and end-state needed to be more specific, otherwise it would be difficult for the U.S. Coast Guard and others to identify appropriate training personnel and programs. Indicating this process should occur at lower levels with Coast Guard officers and other officials, DCM suggested a follow-on meeting at the Embassy where officials from the U.S. and Greece would meet and develop specific requirements. (NOTE: Other Embassy sections are currently engaged in extensive training operations although Kamenos was apparently not informed. END NOTE.) Kamenos said this effort had the full endorsement and support of the Prime

Minister and Parliament. He frequently said he had been given "top down guidance" to implement expeditiously these programs with full funding.

COMMENT

19. (C) We strongly agree that the Hellenic Coast Guard could benefit from U.S. training, specifically helicopter and exchange programs. U.S. training of the Greek Coast Guard would be a step forward in helping address illegal immigration in Greece. It would pay other benefits for the U.S., as the Hellenic Coast Guard is an effective and willing partner on other U.S. priorities, including counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation.
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